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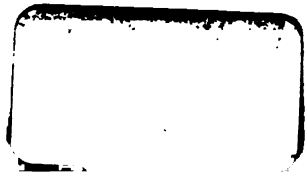

THE UNLAWFULNESS

OF ALL

WARS AND FIGHTINGS

UNDER THE GOSPEL.

GIVEN FORTH BY THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

AT THEIR YEARLY MEETING HELD IN LONDON IN 1841.

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THE UNLAWFULNESS

OF ALL WARS AND FIGHTINGS UNDER THE GOSPEL.

From the earliest period of the history of our religious Society, we have maintained the principle that all wars and fightings are wholly inconsistent with the Gospel dispensation; and we think it right at the present time thus to set forth the scriptural grounds of this principle.

We have ever accepted the Holy Scriptures as of divine authority, and being taught therein to honour the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lawgiver and our King, we have felt it to be an incumbent duty to obey his precepts. Among these precepts we have received in their full and comprehensive import those injunctions given forth by our Lord in his sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."[1] These commands of Christ are plain and unequivocal, and if we thus accept them, and are enabled through his grace to obey them without flinching and without compromise, we can take no part in war; for how can we destroy those whom we are taught to love, or injure those whom we are commanded to bless? How can we

[1] Mat. v. 44.

seek to kill those to whom we are required to do good; or treat with malevolence or cruelty those for whom we are enjoined to pray?

No lesson is more clearly taught in the Gospel than the forgiveness of injuries. This duty is repeatedly enjoined by our Lord himself. It is even made the condition on which we are to ask for the pardon of our own offences: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."[1] "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."[2] How solemn are his expressions when speaking of the punishment of the unmerciful servant! "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."[3] Thus does the law of Christ strike at the root of revenge: it forbids all vindictive feelings, even when an injury is committed or an insult is offered; it prevents all animosities and strife; it cuts off the exercise of retaliation; it eradicates the very elements of war.

Nor is it by *precept* alone that our Lord has taught us that we are not to fight. He is himself "The Prince of Peace;"[4] and in accordance with this blessed character He hath left us an *example* that we should follow his steps[5]—an example which to the Christian ought of itself to be a conclusive authority against all war; for if we are the disciples of Christ, we ought ourselves also so to walk even as he walked:[6] "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to

[1] Mat. vi. 12. [2] Mat. vi. 15. [3] Mat. xviii. 35.
[4] Isaiah, ix. 6. [5] 1 Pet. ii. 21. [6] 1 John, ii. 6.

him that judgeth righteously."[1] He rebuked his disciples when they sought to exercise revenge, saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."[2] If we follow the example of Him who went about doing good, and who prayed even for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,"[3] how can we either directly or indirectly do violence or injury to others? Neither will the Christian who rightly estimates the example of his Lord be disposed to elude or restrict it, or to weaken its force by any arguments of casuistry or expediency. He will not have one standard for his private, and another for his public duties. That which prescribes his conduct as a man, will regulate it also as a subject and a citizen, and even as a ruler. His demeanour in every relation of life will proclaim his undivided allegiance to the Prince of Peace, and will show that he is wholly redeemed from the spirit and the practice of wars and fightings.

Did the precepts and the example of their Lord thus regulate the lives of professing Christians, how would their consistent conduct exert its powerful influence over their fellow-countrymen, until the pure and peaceable principles of the Gospel gave the impress of their own blessed character to the community at large! Thus would the coming of that day be hastened when, according to the language of ancient evangelical prophecy, men "shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 23. [2] Luke, ix. 55, 56. [3] Luke, xxiii. 34.

shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."[1]

It is true that in the inscrutable wisdom of his providence, the Almighty was at times pleased, under a former dispensation, to permit and to authorise war for the punishment of nations for their wickedness: but this is no warrant for *us* to fight. We can plead no such authority; we are living under that administration of grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.[2] His advent upon earth was ushered in by a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."[3] It is the purpose of our heavenly Father that mankind should be brought under the power of this grace and this truth. As this becomes the case, that love to our native land and that affection to our countrymen which are natural to us, are enlarged, exalted and purified. Under the sacred and blessed influence of the love of Christ, we not only seek to live in harmony with our own countrymen, and in the performance of acts of brotherly kindness towards them; but, under the expansive power of the same heavenly principle, we acknowledge the people of every nation, of every colour, and of every clime, as our brethren, the children of one and the same Almighty Parent, our Father in heaven. Regarding them in this relation, we desire to serve them, to help them, and to do them good; we feel that to injure or to destroy them is to violate that brotherhood which God has established between us, is to transgress that holy

[1] Isaiah, ii. 4. [2] John, i. 17. [3] Luke, ii. 14.

law of peace and goodwill which is the distinguishing characteristic of the dominion of our Lord and Saviour.

We have observed with satisfaction and thankfulness, that the Holy Scriptures have been widely distributed in Heathen and Mahomedan nations in the native languages of the people, and that the truths of the Gospel have met with a ready acceptance by many who had been living in superstition, idolatry, and vice. But it ought never to be pleaded by any in justification of war and conquest, that these may prepare the way for the extension of the kingdom of our holy Redeemer over nations sunk in ignorance and darkness. In our apprehension it is highly displeasing in the sight of God, for the inhabitants of a Christian country to pervert those talents which ought to have been devoted to His service, to the invention and exercise of means for the subjugation and oppression of less enlightened countries:—That naval and military armaments should have ever gone forth to any of those lands, spreading desolation, misery, and death among the unoffending inhabitants, we cannot but regard as a reproach to a people who profess to be the followers of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.[1]

Even in times of outward tranquillity, military colleges and other establishments are maintained in nations professing the Gospel of Christ, in which men are trained for warriors, and designedly imbued with sentiments of human glory and ambition. For rational beings, possessing immortal souls, and all created by the same merciful Father, to be systematically instructed in the art of wounding and killing each other, and to

[1] Heb. vii. 26.

exercise their skill to do this most effectually, is in itself so utterly opposed to the precepts of Christ, and therefore sinful, that nothing but the force of education and long familiarity with the practice and the history of war, can have reconciled sincere professors of faith in Christ, to the continuance of this practice.

We live at a time when the principles of inviolable peace are not generally embraced by either rulers or people, it therefore behoves those who maintain them to endeavour to be separated from the spirit and the policy of this world; and, in the exercise of a tender conscience, to be on their guard that they do not, in any of their transactions, act contrary to their high profession. They not only have to guard against being concerned in either offensive or defensive war, but against bearing arms for aggression or defence. On occasions of public excitement or party politics, they have especial need to watch unto prayer, and to let their communication be good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers:[1] if civil tumults arise and military force be resorted to, it is alike incumbent upon them to maintain this watchfulness, and to be careful that they do not weaken themselves by trusting in this means of protection: when war prevails, and battles are fought by sea and land, it becomes the faithful subject of the Prince of Peace not to place his dependence on fleets or armies; nor to allow in himself or countenance in others, anything at variance with the patience, the quietness, or the reliance of a Christian. How forcible and how applicable on such occasions is the declaration of Holy

[1] Eph. iv. 29.

Scripture, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed!"[1] To them He becomes as a shield and a wall of defence round about them; and they may humbly say, "The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God!"[2]

We take comfort in the persuasion, that the peaceable principles of the Gospel are spreading in the world: we are thankful in having been permitted to live in a day when, under the cheering influence of peace, a friendly intercourse between nations, formerly enemies to each other, has been long maintained. Their inhabitants have travelled from one country to another, in that confidence and security which a firm peace brings with it; exchanging acts of friendship and kindness, and in many instances receiving and imparting that knowledge which would promote the happiness one of another. The institutions of nations have been improved, and the moral and religious welfare of the people has been promoted. We have with great satisfaction observed that, in some instances of later times, disputes between nations of professing Christendom have been peaceably settled by referring them to the arbitration of other powers. We earnestly desire that this amicable method of adjusting differences between governments may become more and more general, until it shall be invariably adopted.

Whilst advocating the views of the course of life which a consistent Christian should adopt, and briefly adverting to some of those practices which lead from the right way of the Lord, we feel bound to declare our high value for the benefits of civil Government,

[1] Psalm cxxv. 1. [2] Psalm lxii. 7.

and to acknowledge the duty of cheerfully submitting to it, and yielding a ready obedience to its authority, in all cases in which the law of Christ is not compromised. But there are cases in which we consider that this law is compromised. Amongst these, we have, as a religious society, uniformly included the performance of military service, and the hiring of a substitute in the place of such requisition, and also the payment of military rates; when these are enforced we believe it right to submit to the consequences of a refusal in a meek and patient spirit.

We are very sensible that to live in the full observance of the law of righteousness and peace, is a high Christian attainment. In our fallen, unregenerate state, we cannot do this; we are by nature prone to malice and revenge; those lusts which give rise to wars and fightings do war in our members. It is only by submitting to the converting power of the Holy Spirit, and surrendering ourselves to the rule of Him who came to finish transgression, as well as to make reconciliation for iniquity,[1] that we are enabled to commend our principles to the favourable acceptance of others. We have, however, reverently to acknowledge that in the mercy of God many have been strengthened, at different periods of time, thus to adorn their profession of the truth; and when surrounded by threatenings, persecutions, and imminent danger, to give proof that because they were Christians they could not fight. In the recent as well as in the earlier history of our own religious body, we have ample evidence of the all-sufficiency

[1] 1 Dan. ix. 24.

of the protecting, preserving power of the Most High, and of the blessedness of trusting in Him alone in such times of extremity.

With these views of the precepts and example of our Saviour and of the character and requirements of the Gospel dispensation, we feel that it is our duty, not only to seek, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to be ourselves conformed to them, but to make them known to our neighbours, and to promote their universal reception. We would therefore affectionately entreat all our fellow-professors of the Gospel to be willing to examine and see these things for themselves, by the help of that light which maketh all things manifest—the light of the Spirit of God. In proportion as this light is received and followed in faith, the understanding is opened to behold the excellency and the fulness of the divine law; and many things are perceived to be contrary to it, which before were not so regarded. As the Scriptures are read with a single eye, and in dependence on that Spirit by which they were given forth, it will we believe be seen, that war, whatever form it may assume, is opposed to the religion of Jesus Christ, that it is a violation of his righteous law, and hence that it is sin, "for sin is the transgression of the law."[1] Pure and holy as are the commandments of God, they are not too pure for mankind to observe, otherwise they would not have been enjoined. We are not commanded to do that which our Heavenly Father will not enable us to perform.

In the love of Christ, that love which desires the

[1] 1 John, iii. 4.

present and eternal happiness of the whole human race, we earnestly commend these Gospel truths to all who bear His name. Under a measure of the same love we are bold to make our appeal, in an especial manner, to the *rulers* of every nation professing the religion of our Lord and Saviour. We beseech them, in their deliberations and councils, whether in the senate or the cabinet, continually to bear in remembrance the righteousness, the love, and the forbearance inculcated by our Lord and his apostles; and we entreat our fellow-Christians of every clime, and every description among men, seriously to reflect on those unchristian habits and dispositions which are fostered and strengthened by a military life, and on the sin of occupying the time, which is entrusted to us for nobler purposes, in devising the means and acquiring the art of distressing, and killing others—of cutting short the earthly existence of those who are deemed the enemies of their country, and thus hurrying them into the presence of a just and righteous God.

We desire that religiously concerned parents may be brought to see the evil of suffering their children to be trained in the art and science of war. May all who are entrusted with the education of the young, be enabled, in the fear of God, and under the influence of heavenly wisdom, to impress them with a sense of the miseries and sinfulness of war, to guard them, especially when reading history or biography, whether ancient or modern, against those false principles of honour, which are often acquired in early life, and against an admiration of the deeds or renown of those who have been the destroyers of the human race. O that our fellow-professors of the Christian religion would

renounce the vain glory and pomp of military achievements, and that policy which leads to aggrandizement, retaliation, and enmity—that in national, not less than in individual, intercourse they would cherish a desire that all may be done in strict accordance with the precept, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."[1] Then we reverently believe that He whose prerogative it is to bestow his blessing or to withhold it, would prosper the councils of those who thus acted in obedience to his law, would grant them national peace and happiness, and make them a blessing to all around them.

Living in love and goodwill towards the whole family of man, the servants of the Lord Jesus would be found endeavouring, through his help, to lessen the mass of human misery, vice and crime, to pull down the strongholds of sin and Satan, and to extend the peaceable reign of the Messiah. Exercising faith in Him whom they call their Lord, and fully acting up to his commands, they would, through the grace that is in them, be made instrumental in leavening those around them, by the force of Christian example, as with the leaven of the kingdom of our Holy Redeemer, that kingdom which is ultimately to pervade and prevail over all; when the heathen are to be given to Him for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession,[2] when the kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ;[3] when violence shall no more be heard in the land, wasting nor destruction within its borders;[4]—and

[1] Matt. vii. 12. [2] Psalm ii. 8. [3] Rev. xi. 15.
[4] Isaiah, lx. 18.

when those memorable words of the prayer which our Lord taught his disciples shall be fulfilled, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."[1] Amen.

Signed in and on behalf of the Meeting aforesaid, by

GEORGE STACEY,

Clerk to the Meeting this year.

[1] Matt. vi. 10.

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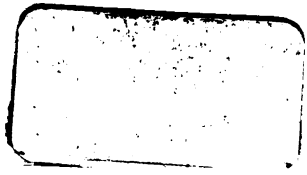

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